

Domestic Violence in the Workplace – Ask The Expert



Domestic violence can become a workplace safety issue even if the employee hasn't directly disclosed it.

QUESTION

One of my team members has shown a sudden drop in morale and productivity. I've overheard this worker receiving frequent, upsetting phone calls from their partner while at work. The worker hasn't disclosed anything formally, but I'm worried this may be domestic violence spilling into the workplace. What are my obligations, and how can I support this employee without overstepping?

ANSWER

Start by approaching this employee privately and expressing concern about the changes you've noticed. Focus on behaviour, not assumptions. If this employee confirms a risk, conduct a safety assessment with them. This may include screening calls, modifying work schedules or locations, adjusting access controls, and developing a personal workplace safety plan. Encourage them to contact local support services or employee assistance programs (EAPs) if available.

Follow your organization's policies: these typically include evaluating potential risks, implementing reasonable

safeguards, and maintaining confidentiality except where disclosure is required to protect safety.

Keep in mind that your role is to support—not to investigate or provide counselling. Check in periodically, ensure safety measures remain effective, and document steps taken in accordance with your policies.

EXPLANATION

Domestic or intimate partner violence can affect workplace performance, psychological safety, and physical security. Most jurisdictions require employers to take reasonable precautions once they become aware—or ought to be aware—of a potential workplace violence risk. Best practice involves:

- Noticing and responding to concerning patterns early.
- Having a confidential, empathetic conversation to open the door for disclosure.
- Implementing risk-reduction measures tailored to the employee and workplace.
- Coordinating with internal and external supports while respecting privacy.